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## Fourth Committee

**Summary record of the 26th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 13 November 2000, at 3 p.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Lewis ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

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00-74359 (E)

*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

**Agenda item 87: Questions relating to information** (*continued*) (A/55/21 and A/55/452)

1. **Mr. Akasaka** (Japan) said that he shared the views expressed by the representative of the Netherlands and considered it essential that the United Nations make the best use of information technology in grappling with the wide range of problems that the world was facing.

2. He stressed the importance of outreach to non-governmental organizations through new information technologies as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (A/55/452). Such efforts should be encouraged because they facilitated more effective use of the information already made available by the United Nations.

3. As the largest contributor to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), his Government fully shared the view of the Department of Public Information (DPI) on the need for further coordination with the resident coordinators and United Nations information centres (UNIC) in enhancing outreach. He therefore requested that the Secretariat provide an update on progress made to date in that area.

4. The United Nations should also develop a stronger partnership with the media through timely dissemination of updated information. The annual United Nations World Television Forums were a worthy initiative and he noted that the most influential media institution in Japan, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), which had provided the high-definition video screen for the Millennium Summit and the Millennium General Assembly, would be co-hosting the next Forum. He looked forward to expanded cooperation among world media organs and between the world media and the United Nations in covering United Nations activities.

5. The DPI programme for enhancing radio broadcasting capacity was particularly important for people in developing countries, given their limited access to the media; he hoped that the programme would continue and that it would produce tangible results in many countries.

6. His delegation strongly supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to improve United Nations peacekeeping operations. However, the number of such operations varied, while demand for public information services tended to remain constant. Due account should therefore be taken of the structure of the institutions providing public information services so that they could operate as effectively and efficiently as possible.

7. **Mr. Dausá Céspedes** (Cuba) said that information and communication had acquired undeniable importance in all areas of human activity; the processes of globalization were based largely on technological and scientific advances in those areas.

8. The development of information and communication technology had brought with it a bitter paradox: the greater the progress, the greater the technological gap between developed and undeveloped countries. Clearly, the reality was that while some countries spoke of accelerating the development of the Internet and the most sophisticated means of communication, others were faced with exceedingly high levels of illiteracy and poverty.

9. At a time when knowledge was the key to development, the technological gap between North and South continued to widen as a result of the growing privatization of scientific research and its results. The developed countries, and the United States in particular, were rushing to patent not only technologies but the very ideas which underpinned the new economy thereby creating new barriers for the countries of the third world.

10. Profit was more important than need in private research, intellectual property rights deprived the less developed countries of knowledge and patent legislation did not recognize the knowledge or traditional property systems that were so important in the South. The solution was not to reject the benefits of development and globalization, but to work so that they might bring countries together rather than separate them.

11. If the objective was truly to bring about a new world information and communication order, priority must be given to the promotion of science and technology in the developing countries so that they would be not mere passive users of modern means of information and communication, but active partners in the development of those resources.

12. The United Nations information centres could and should play an important role, particularly in developing countries. In that regard, he reiterated his

concern at the rate at which information centres were being incorporated into local United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices and noted that despite some progress, not all the objectives had been achieved.

13. He commended United Nations and Department of Public Information efforts to develop web sites but reiterated that that should be done without prejudice to United Nations television and radio programmes, which remained essential to developing countries. It was also necessary to continue efforts to improve the web site in all official languages of the United Nations; he noted with satisfaction that much had been accomplished the past 12 months.

14. Information was an ideal instrument for promoting international peace and security, economic development and trust in international relations, but communication technologies and the media could also be used for purposes inconsistent with peacekeeping, international stability and State security.

15. He again denounced the radio and television aggression that Cuba received daily from the United States. Those broadcasts not only constituted an attack on State sovereignty; they also violated international law and the regulations established by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) International Frequency Registration Board and promoted subversive action against Cuba. His Government would continue to do its utmost to scramble them.

16. **Mr. Carp** (United States of America) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States and said that the United States of America considered it very important for each department to take a critical look at its operation in light of the need to set new priorities as a result of the outcome of the Millennium Summit. The Department of Public Information should mobilize and reprogramme its financial and staff resources to address priority areas.

17. An adequate information infrastructure was critical to the success of peacekeeping operations and to the safety of the peacekeepers and other international personnel.

18. All United Nations activities should be regularly evaluated with a view to their rationalization. His delegation questioned the need for 65 information centres when there were United Nations offices in over 170 countries. Many cities hosted both an information centre and several United Nations agencies. His Government believed that those offices should better coordinate their outreach activities in order to free up funds and staff that could be used for priority areas such as peacekeeping, humanitarian relief and efforts to combat human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

19. The United Nations web site had proven to be very useful and was justifiably accessed many times each day; however, it appeared that the current infrastructure was inadequate, a fact which also affected the Organization's other modes of electronic communication, which shared the same bandwidth. He urged the Department to continue cooperation with the Information Technology Services Division in order to make the contents of the Optical Disk System (ODS) available on the United Nations web site.

20. His delegation also believed that the Department could handle certain of its publishing activities more efficiently and eliminate others that were no longer useful.

21. As the Secretary-General had announced in his report, "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century", two major initiatives involving outside partnerships were under way: the Health InterNetwork and the United Nations Information Technology Service (UNITeS). He commended the Secretary-General for those efforts to bridge the digital divide.

22. Lastly, he asked the representative of Cuba to cooperate constructively with all members and to focus on the Department's efforts in areas such as peacekeeping operations, in which many members of the Group of 77 were participating.

23. **Mr. Ononye** (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that unprecedented developments in information and communication technology were increasingly having an impact on daily life and facilitating globalization; the consequences were both positive and negative, such as the marginalization of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

24. The Group of 77 and China supported initiatives taken by the Secretary-General with a view to bridging the digital divide between the developing and

developed countries. It also supported the convening of the fifth United Nations World Television Forum and hoped that the latter would propose concrete measures specially developed to narrow the digital divide.

25. The Group of 77 and China appreciated the Department's efforts to provide worldwide coverage of the Millennium Summit through, inter alia, a high-quality web site. It also welcomed the soon-to-be-launched web site publicizing the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

26. It was important to sustain information activities in areas of concern to developing countries and countries with economies in transition, including economic and social development, poverty eradication, human rights, eradication of drug trafficking and environmental issues. The Group of 77 and China also supported public information activities in the fields of disarmament, peace-making, preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and decolonization.

27. The Group of 77 and China supported the Secretariat's efforts to promote global outreach through broadcasting arrangements with radio stations in most regions of the world since radio remained the communications medium most accessible to developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

28. **Mr. Hong** Je Ryong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that public information remained an indispensable means for accelerating economic and social development and promoting the well-being of people. Therefore, the main objective of international public information activities in the new century should be the establishment of a new and just international information order. The rapid development of information and communication technology was one of the major factors reshaping the world and promoting the well-being of mankind. However, the benefits were confined to a few countries, and most developing countries remained on the margin. In addition, some were still trying to disseminate on a large scale their own ideology, culture and values and to distort reality by monopolizing public information and communication technology. The ancient cultures of developing countries were fading away and distrust among countries was burgeoning. That constituted a threat to humanity and to the maintenance of international peace and security.

29. Member States must attempt, through public information activities, to strengthen friendship and cooperation and promote sustainable development on the basis of respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. Furthermore, attempts to use the communication media to create chaos and disorder and to incite anti-Government forces in other countries must be stopped.

30. On the other hand, developing countries must be given an opportunity to participate in international public information activities, which would require enhancing both their own information capacity and engaging in international cooperation.

31. With regard to the enhancement of the public information activities of the United Nations, he stressed the need to ensure their impartiality and objectivity and to increase the dissemination of development issues, which were of greatest concern to the developing countries. At the same time, the United Nations and the international financial institutions should provide material and financial assistance to the developing countries with a view to narrowing the gap between them and the developed countries in that area.

32. **Ms. Rusu** (Romania) said that her delegation shared the views expressed by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

33. She stressed the importance of the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in Bucharest, which had provided services to about 8,000 readers during the past 12 months. One of its valued services was the reference library, which gave access to a comprehensive collection of United Nations publications and materials. The Centre also produced a great number of printed articles and news broadcasts, and had organized more than 20 conferences during the course of the year. It had also helped to launch the first scholarship for Romanian journalists training in the United States.

34. The Bucharest Centre had co-sponsored many activities with members of civil society, the business community and various non-governmental organizations, with a view to establishing and consolidating links with those sectors. In cooperation with the office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Romania, the Centre had provided computers, printers, and Internet access to 15 university libraries.

35. Romania strongly supported the functional autonomy of the information centres. It also supported

the Secretary-General's initiative to create United Nations Houses in the field, and reiterated its offer regarding the creation of such a House in Bucharest.

36. **Mr. Speransky** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation agreed with the Secretary-General's assessment of the work of the Department of Public Information (DPI) in projecting United Nations activities in such priority spheres as peacekeeping, security and human rights. The accelerated development of information and communication technology and the benefits that stemmed from the enhancement of international cooperation activities also created the preconditions for a new information confrontation in the international arena. With a view to halting efforts to use the scientific and technical revolution for purposes inconsistent with general progress, the Russian Federation had submitted to the General Assembly a draft resolution entitled "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security" (A/C.1/55/L.6), which had already been adopted by the First Committee.

37. His delegation recognized the work of DPI in opening and modernizing specialized United Nations web sites. The United Nations electronic site in Russian had considerably improved and the volume of information it offered had grown, which would help to attract more Russian users. Another important DPI activity had been the technical maintenance of information centres in the field. The activities of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow had noticeably grown.

38. And yet, it was important to emphasize the inequality between the developed and the developing countries in accessing the newest achievements of modern technologies; that problem had been mentioned at the Okinawa Summit Meeting of the Group of 8. The Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society, which had been adopted at that meeting, urged the public and private sectors to bridge the international gap in information and knowledge.

39. Although his delegation was in favour of the establishment of a modern global information society which would guarantee freedom of expression and general access to information for all under conditions of equality, it also recognized that globalization could have negative consequences, such as the obliteration of national self-expression and the unification of cultures. That problem could be overcome by developing culture and ethics in harmony with the economic, political and scientific spheres of society.

40. **Mr. Poukré-Kono** (Central African Republic) stressed the importance of information for making known United Nations activities in the major areas for which it was responsible, such as international peace and security, sustainable development, promotion of human rights and environmental protection. With regard to the reorientation of United Nations information activities, his country stressed the importance of radio as a means of outreach. Radio continued to be the classic and indispensable tool for the greater part of the population of the developing countries. On the other hand, his country supported multilingualism on United Nations web sites, since, in its opinion, that strengthened the universal character of the Organization.

41. Unfortunately, the rapid advance of information technologies increased the gap between developed and developing countries; he hoped that international solidarity would help to reduce it. For the time being, radio continued to be the most accessible outreach medium for the developing countries, which was the reason why the United Nations broadcasting capacity should be strengthened. The continuation of the pilot project initiated before the Millennium Summit and Assembly should be encouraged, since it had made it possible to launch a sensitization campaign that had proved very successful. In view of the clear interest aroused by the information disseminated by the Organization, that project should be continued and converted into a programme supported by all Member States.

42. The information component of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA) had helped to promote calm during the country's crisis. A private radio station was now continuing the work begun by Radio MINURCA, illustrating the link between the United Nations and private radio stations worldwide. Radio Centrafrique had also always cooperated with United Nations Radio and periodically disseminated broadcasts from Headquarters. In conclusion, he expressed the wish that United Nations Radio Africa should be assigned the personnel and resources that it merited and needed in order to cope with the tasks of the twenty-first century.

43. **Mr. Camara** (Guinea) said that he endorsed the statement made by Nigeria, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The rapid development of information technology created a considerable gap between developed and developing countries. He did not question the benefits of globalization and development but considered it necessary for the international community to mobilize to reduce that gap. If it was desired to create a new world communications order, the technological and scientific advancement of the developing countries must be facilitated as a matter of priority, so that they would not be merely users but also indispensable actors in development. The United Nations bore a major responsibility for the achievement of that objective. His delegation considered it necessary to strengthen the Organization's capacity to communicate with the population of the various countries through information centres, which must produce local programmes and organize activities demonstrating the importance of the work of the United Nations throughout the world.

44. Guinea welcomed the new policy for the decentralization of the activities of the Department of Public Information and reiterated its wish that the West African station of the United Nations international radio network should be established in Conakry. The world in general, and the population of Guinea and West Africa in particular, should be better informed about the manner in which developing countries confronted problems relating to development, peace and armed conflict.

45. His Government supported the formulation of integrated information programmes highlighting the role of the United Nations in social and economic development, human rights, democracy, peace and security. In that connection, Guinea, which was a troop-contributing country for peacekeeping operations, assigned great importance to the coordination of activities between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

46. **Mr. Dausá Céspedes** (Cuba), exercising his right of reply, said to the United States representative that his country had always been, and would continue to be, prepared to work constructively to promote the security of peacekeeping personnel, particularly since 80 per cent of the personnel came from fraternal developing countries. The question raised by the United States representative bore no relation to the agenda item before the Committee. The debate on questions relating to information was very important for Cuba, since it enabled it to denounce the ongoing aggression perpetrated by the United States against Cuba through the broadcast media.

*The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.*